



Columnist Robert De Andreis

Of implants and Wonderbras™

by ROBERT DE ANDREIS

Last week a friend of mine invited me on a day trip with him to Napa — the vineyards, not the state hospital. After much wine tasting, my friend got loopy, and on the trip back he started disclosing things about his childhood in the Midwest. Who cares about anyone's childhood anymore? As we passed a cow pasture, he told me the story of the first blow job he received, from a milking calf! Being a big city kid, I missed out on all that barnyard fun. Are these the traditional American values they teach kids in the heartland?

As I sat in the passenger seat and looked ahead, he kept disappearing from my peripheral vision. Fearing that I was losing more sight in that eye from CMV, I called my doctor as soon as I got home. Vision loss from CMV must be handled immediately, so I saw my doctor the next day. After the eye drops and examination, my doctor concluded that my vision hadn't changed. It's just been so long since I've been a passenger in a car that the vision loss from the left eye seemed more noticeable.

Since I was there, I asked him about a tiny stitch of thread protruding from my left eyeball, where the gancyclovir pellet implant was sewn in. It's an annoying, stubble-size black stitch that sticks out of the white part of my eye. Although you have to get close to notice it, it's still gross. "No problem," my doctor said. "I'll just trim it." He had me lean my head on this device and held my

eyelid open. But every time he came at me with his special trimming scissors, I'd jerk away in a reflex response. "Just relax, it's not going to hurt," he said. I couldn't do it, so next month he'll try it with a laser.

I'm tempted to take a pair of tweezers to it myself, but I'm afraid if I did, my pupil might pop out like a button, followed by all that oozing eye gunk. Still, the implant was a tradeoff I couldn't be more pleased with. The other option was to continue IV infusions of a stronger drug I know I would have gone down on. Because of the implant I haven't had my apartment filled with boxes of needles, an IV pole and biohazardous waste containers in months. I don't regret going through that experience, but I am grateful that I don't have to do it any longer — at least for the time being.

The only trace of my infusing days is my chest port — that raised, nickle-sized

device sewn under my skin with a tube attached to a major artery. In the late stages of AIDS, if you have to infuse every day, you need a device like this to protect the arm veins which can't tolerate continual use. I blessed my chest port when I was using it — but now that I'm not, it only serves as an eerie reminder. I'm sure if I was fat and had flabby pecs, I wouldn't even notice it. Not only does it stick out on me, but it sets off security alarms, heats up around microwaves and interferes with the radar of small planes. Maybe that's how I ended up with a couple of dizzy air hostesses on my roof.

Someone recently suggested I should get another port for the other side, buy a Wonderbra™ and blond wig, go down to Union Street to pick up straight men. "Why would I do that?" I said, "Straight men give such lousy head."

All that gender talk triggered me sexually, and I tossed and turned last night until I sprang out of bed. Boing! I put on a sleazy outfit and braved the night.

There he was, alone and vulnerable. He had that just-tested-positive look, so I knew it would be safe for me. I'm tired of catching things from all those HIV-negative guys! As our bodies pressed against each other, I hoped he wouldn't notice my port. Since he was prematurely bald, I figured I was doing him a big favor anyway and he had no right to complain about my lumpy chest port. Besides, I'm sick of covering it up. But he felt it and jerked away. "What's this?" he asked, trying to be polite.

"It's my chest port, you idiot! Don't you read my column?"

After I explained, he became way too chatty for that time of night, patted me on the back (feeling for more ports, no doubt) and walked away.

I stood there and sighed. If I could still cry over this disease it would have been then. Maybe I'm still reluctant to throw in the towel and live the rest of my days in solitude, the way I'm supposed to. Maybe I just don't get it. "Robert, honey," I told myself, "give it up. Things are never going to be the way they were."

The next morning I called my doctor and discussed the possibility of removing my port. I could always have it put back in if I need it later and I'm sick of wondering when I'll ever use it again. He agreed, and scheduled the minor surgical procedure for the next day!

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